



Office of the Inspector General

Matthew L. Cate, Inspector General

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**The California Institution for Women suffers from
operational and maintenance problems, but the warden
has steered the prison in a positive direction**

SACRAMENTO—In the first review of its kind, the state's Inspector General reports that the California Institution for Women in Corona faces numerous challenges, such as aging, overcrowded facilities and poor management of its education program. However, despite CIW's operational and facility flaws, Warden Dawn Davison's strong vision and leadership demonstrate her personal commitment to improving the prison.

In a report released today, the Inspector General details the findings of an audit of CIW's operations and summarizes an audit of Davison's performance following her appointment as warden.

The Office of the Inspector General performed the combined prison and warden audit under the authority provided by a recent amendment to the California Penal Code, which requires the Inspector General to audit each prison at least once every four years and each prison warden one year after appointment.

"My office found several areas of concern at CIW, most notably the deteriorating buildings and overcrowded living conditions," said Inspector General Matthew L. Cate. "I hope this report prompts the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to examine and fix the prison's infrastructure problems."

Built more than 50 years ago, CIW's infrastructure suffers from neglect, and many areas create hazards for staff and inmates alike. The perimeter fence is rusty, roofs need replacement, and walkways are cracked and crumbling. Moreover, the prison had to use its own funds to renovate the support care unit, which houses inmates needing intensive mental health treatment. Department headquarters only provided partial funding to make the repairs—prison officials state that the remaining renovation funds have been delayed, for up to seven years in some cases.

Overcrowding exacerbates the poor living conditions, requiring up to 36 women to share one toilet and sink in areas converted to dormitory housing. The lack of space coupled with deteriorating facilities raises tensions among inmates and is not an acceptable long-term housing solution.

The Inspector General's audit also found a number of operational and policy problems at CIW, mostly concerning the prison's education program. Attendance data shows students attend class for only 42 percent of the available classroom time. In addition, the prison often fails to identify and assign poor readers to the academic program—many of these inmates are assigned to other institutional jobs or training programs.

In fact, national studies prove that education programs reduce inmate recidivism rates. A 2006 study by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that basic adult education programs reduce inmate recidivism an average of 5.1 percent. The study also found that vocational education programs reduce recidivism an average of 12.6 percent.

"Education is fundamental to inmate rehabilitation efforts," said Inspector General Cate. "If inmates miss class or are shut out of the academic program entirely, their chances of success outside prison are greatly diminished. These are the inmates who reoffend and continue the cycle of recidivism."

The Inspector General's audit of CIW also found policy and procedural lapses in medical care, visiting, use-of-force documentation, and weapons training. Some audit findings support staff comments that Warden Davison does not hold managers accountable for policy lapses in these areas. However, Davison cites an increase in staff disciplinary actions since her appointment as warden as evidence that she is not tolerating violations of department policy.

Regarding the warden's performance, the audit shows that Warden Davison is a strong supporter of inmate rehabilitation. Personal interviews and surveys portray Davison as a compassionate warden, and she has successfully implemented several innovative, gender-responsive programs at the prison despite operational and facility challenges.

Programs implemented under Davison's tenure include Bonding Mothers with Babies, California's first in-prison nursery. In addition, CIW recently introduced the nation's first pre-apprenticeship carpentry program for female inmates. The prison also offers programs for inmates to take college courses or train to fight wildfires.

Overall, the Inspector General found that Warden Davison is a good fit for CIW. She is well liked by both the staff and inmates, and more than 70 percent of staff members who were confidentially interviewed rated Davison's performance as "very good" or "outstanding."

The Inspector General made seven audit findings and provided 23 recommendations to address CIW's specific operational and maintenance challenges. The entire audit report may be viewed and downloaded from the Office of the Inspector General's Web site at <http://www.oig.ca.gov/>.

The Office of the Inspector General is an independent state agency responsible for oversight of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The office carries out its mission by conducting audits, special reviews, and investigations of the department to uncover criminal conduct, administrative wrongdoing, poor management practices, waste, fraud, and other abuses by staff, supervisors, and management. The Office of the Inspector General conducted this audit under the authority provided in California Penal Code section 6126.

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